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SUBJECT: TOGO: AMBASSADOR HAWKINS'S PARIS CONSULTATIONS
(SEPTEMBER 28)

Classified By: Andrew Young, Political Counselor, 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: French officials at the MFA, Presidency, and MOD generally agreed with U.S. Ambassador to Togo Patricia Hawkins's assessment of the situation in Togo concerning the importance of the presidential election in 2010, the weakness of the opposition, and the tensions that might arise from a victory by President Faure Gnassingbe, which seemed likely. While agreeing that Faure remained in large measure an enigma, the French said they believe he did intend to move Togo in a positive direction and that his political instincts were essentially "moderate" in nature.
END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) U.S. Ambassador to Togo Patricia Hawkins on September 28 met, separately, with MFA DAS-equivalent Laurent Bigot, Presidential AF-advisor Remi Marechaux, and MOD Africa Specialist Jerome Spinoza. Embassy AF-assistant attended the Bigot and Marechaux meetings; AF-watcher attended the Spinoza meeting.

MEETING WITH BIGOT (MFA)

¶3. (C) Ambassador Hawkins offered her overview of Togo, centered on the upcoming presidential election. She noted the lack of consensus between the government and opposition on several key issues and the hesitancy of donors to release election-support funds. Bigot, making the first of several similar comments from himself and the other GOF interlocutors, remarked that Faure was a "moderate" but had to contend with very hard-line elements within the ruling RPT, including influential ministers Gilbert Bawara and Pascal Bodjona. Bigot and Ambassador Hawkins agreed that the opposition had been outmaneuvered (once again) on a number of election-related issues, such as the composition of the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI). This prompted a discussion of the opposition's weaknesses.

¶4. (C) These weaknesses included an aging and increasingly out-of-touch leadership (e.g., Gilchrist Olympio), the lack of a younger generation of leaders in Olympio's UFC party and in other opposition parties, the sense of expectation that it was, finally, the opposition's "turn" to hold power and a consequent lack of tenacity in taking on or challenging the opposition, and, most important, a failure by the opposition to state clearly what it would do for Togo and its people should it ever be voted into office. This lack of a coherent platform, Ambassador Hawkins stressed at several points, was the opposition's greatest shortcoming, making it hard for voters to conclude that they should vote for the opposition. She noted also the uncertainty that the opposition, lacking real governing experience, had the skilled personnel that could actually run a country. Bigot said that he had met Olympio recently and that he had "no idea of governance," choosing instead to see the political struggle as a continuation of the battle between the Olympio and Gnassingbe families.

15. (C) Bigot expressed concern that the UFC would not accept defeat even as the result of a relatively clean election and he thought that opposition members would reflexively "blame France," believing that France would naturally have had a role in ensuring a Gnassingbe victory. Bigot said he was not optimistic about how the election scenario would play out, and he said it was important to stress to both sides the need for both to do their best to hold a proper election. Ambassador Hawkins observed that if Faure won, he might remain a prisoner of the hard-line RPT faction; if the opposition won, it might be incapable of governing and might seek to avenge past perceived wrongs. Neither scenario boded well for Togo's future. Togo would become even more vulnerable to drug trafficking, which was becoming a serious problem (although Faure, to his credit, recently expelled two suspected Latin American traffickers), terrorists seeking new bases, money launderers, and other hallmarks of a failed state. Togo needed help, but that could prove difficult following a tainted election. On the other hand, a good election could lead to renewed support from France and the EU.

MEETING WITH MARECHAUX (PRESIDENCY)

16. (C) Ambassador Hawkins's discussion with Presidential AF-advisor Marechaux was along similar lines, with Ambassador Hawkins noting the blockage and lack of consensus in Togo centered on the elections. Marechaux remarked that the GOF did not have contact with Faure in New York at the UNGA and that new AF-advisor Andre Parant (replacing Bruno Joubert) might visit Lome. In discussing Faure's advisors Bawara and

PARIS 00001357 002 OF 003

Bodjona, Marechaux was less willing than Ambassador Hawkins to put Bawara in the extreme hard-line camp. He said that French officials had frequent contact with him and that he was also useful in dealing with the DRC's President Kabila ("we used Bawara a lot"). Bawara was one of Faure's more worldly advisors. Ambassador Hawkins noted that Bawara had said that Togo "needed France and Germany but not the U.S." when Faure was considering whether to attend the POTUS-hosted lunch for African leaders at the UNGA (which Faure did attend). Ambassador Hawkins said that corruption in Togo was a very serious obstacle to Togo's quest to make progress on MCC issues.

17. (C) Ambassador Hawkins detailed for Marechaux the Kpatcha affair and Kpatcha's attempt to find refuge in the U.S. Embassy after Faure moved against him for alleged coup plotting. Ambassador Hawkins and Marechaux agreed that several aspects of the coup plot remained unclear, and it was not certain there was enough evidence to convict the plotters.

18. (C) Turning to Faure, Marechaux offered an assessment that was more positive than Bigot's, saying that France had known him "a long time," that Faure knew his dossiers, that he could answer plausibly questions on where Togo would be in 10 years, and that he could accept defeat. Indicating that Faure was therefore someone with whom the French could work, Marechaux said it was "no accident" that Togo was the first country to have successfully renegotiated its defense agreement with France, a product of the very early days of independence. (NOTE: France maintains "defense agreements" that date to the independence era with eight African countries and is in the process of renegotiating them to bring them up to date as part of the Sarkozy Government's policy of modernizing relations in Africa. The other agreement that has been formally renegotiated is the one with Cameroon. END NOTE.)

19. (C) Marechaux commented that the French arrest warrant against Charles Debbasch, a longtime Gnassingbe advisor and French legal expert, had been suspended in December 2008 and that Debbasch was now free to travel to France. (NOTE: The warrant had been issued after Debbasch fled France following

his conviction on embezzlement charges in connection with his serving as director of an arts foundation in France. He decamped to Togo where he enjoyed the protection of the Gnassingbes. When the warrant was in effect, he was supposedly subject to arrest if he returned to France. END NOTE.) Marechaux indicated that the validity of the warrant lapsed because an arrest of Debbasch had not taken place during a specified time period.

¶10. (C) Marechaux agreed with Ambassador Hawkins on the need to maintain pressure concerning the elections. He said that the election in Gabon showed that a dynastic clan was not necessarily invincible -- Ali Bongo won the election but the opposition nonetheless captured about 60 percent of the vote. Had the opposition in Gabon been unified, it could have won there. Marechaux suggested that the opposition in Togo was in a similar position -- Faure could be outvoted but still win because of a lack of opposition unity.

¶11. (C) As Ambassador Hawkins was leaving the Presidency at the conclusion of the meeting with Marechaux, she encountered Marechaux's recently reassigned former boss, Bruno Joubert. In a brief conversation, Joubert said that Faure "seemed to have Togo on the right track," and repeated the view expressed by Bigot and Marechaux that Faure was a well-intentioned moderate. Joubert said that he was preparing his departure for his next posting as Ambassador to Morocco, a position he would assume at some point in October.

MEETING WITH SPINOZA (MOD)

¶12. (C) Jerome Spinoza, the West Africa analyst at the MOD's Delegation for Strategic Affairs, admitted that he had not been following Togo closely and was very interested in Ambassador Hawkins's assessment of the current challenges to the country, including the possible destabilizing influence of drug trafficking (as well as increasing drug usage among Togo's upper-class youth), and the presence of at least one radical imam advocating Islamist views. Ambassador Hawkins also noted some of Faure's successes, including progress on security sector reform, and increased professionalism in Togo's military, which has made Togo a better partner in peacekeeping operations. In Spinoza's view, Faure has provided a sense of stability in the country, while Burkina Faso President Blaise Compaore has "played a useful role in helping Togo move away from violence." In Spinoza's view, Togo's priority was to find ways to increase income even

PARIS 00001357 003 OF 003

though the country was lacking in natural resources. Establishing some sort of middle class would help Togo's stability and viability. He viewed ethnic tension decreasing as business partnerships and inter-marriage increased among groups. The fault lines of the future were likely to be socio-economic, rather than ethnic. Regarding the political opposition, Spinoza agreed that it was ineffective. Even worse, Spinoza thought the opposition, broadly, was comfortable in its role and essentially "shared the cake" with the government, noting that there were many avenues of informal dialog and cooperation between the government and opposition figures.

¶13. (U) Ambassador Hawkins departed post before this message was drafted.

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